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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003438

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/13/2015

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SUBJECT: AUC CRITICIZES DEMOBILIZATION LAW AGAIN

REF: BOGOTA 2566

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Several paramilitary commanders gave a press conference on April 10 to say they did not approve of the draft Law for Justice and Peace because it did not provide enough legal guarantees. They said they would break off talks if forced to do so. They did not directly threaten to end negotiations if the law is passed. The press conference was dominated by commanders who have been the least willing to demobilize and most heavily involved in drug trafficking. The least inflexible commanders, including Salvatore Mancuso, were notably absent. End summary.

Reiterating Complaints

2. (U) On April 10, United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) commander Ernesto Baez led a press conference to warn Congress that they do not approve of the draft Law for Justice and Peace because it does not provide adequate legal safeguards. He said the AUC was willing to break off talks and return to the field if forced to do so. Baez specified, however, that the press conference was not an ultimatum or a threat to anyone. This is not the first time the AUC has criticized the law. On March 15, they issued a communique complaining that the draft did not provide enough legal guarantees (reftel). The AUC wants a legal framework that will guarantee no extradition. The GOC, however, has repeatedly assured us that the law will not impede extradition in any way.

3. (C) The commanders who gave the press conference have been the most reticent to demobilize since the peace process began. Ernesto Baez has said if the talks failed, the AUC would have no choice but to form a "right wing insurgency" to fight against the state and the guerrillas. Ramon Isaza, newly named as the AUC's senior commander and commander of the Self Defense Forces of Middle Magdalena, has been reluctant to participate in peace talks because of his mistrust of other AUC commanders. The rest of the commanders present -- Diego Murrillo, Victor Mejia, Francisco Zuluaga, Javier Montanez, and Victor Botalon -- are "narcoparas," who have shown no willingness to demobilize their trafficking structures. The more flexible commanders, including Salvatore Mancuso and Hernan Hernandez, were notably absent.

Little GOC Reaction

4. (SBU) The Peace Commissioner's Office did not respond officially to the press conference. In an interview following an all day negotiation session with the AUC, Peace Commissioner Restrepo said that the AUC's displeasure with the law was only one of many issues discussed during negotiations. Other issues included a message from President Uribe that the AUC must fully comply with the cease-fire. He emphasized that the GOC would not retract the draft law in response to AUC complaints.

Comment

5. (SBU) The AUC did not state the exact circumstances of when they would break off talks. The absence of some of the prominent AUC commanders implies the AUC central command is not in agreement about how to respond to the law.

WOOD